

Ralph P. Balducci, Ph.D.  
Licensed Psychologist (#002303)  
260 Riverside Avenue  
Westport, CT 06880  
HB 6267

State Senator Marilyn Moore  
Capitol Office  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2000  
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

February 20, 2015

Dear Senator Moore:

I am a resident of the 22<sup>nd</sup> district speaking in opposition to HB 6267. I am a psychologist in private practice in Westport for nearly 15 years. Becoming a psychologist required 10 years of education, training, and internship beyond high school followed by a postdoctoral fellowship of a year and national and state licensing examination. In my practice, I see adolescents and adults for psychotherapy and conduct court ordered and other evaluations in juvenile delinquency, criminal, and child protection matters. I serve as a board member of the Connecticut Psychological Association and participate in study groups with other psychologists pertaining both to forensic psychology and psychotherapy. I regularly meet with other psychologists and mental health professionals for networking and attend a variety of trainings for continuing education throughout the year.

I was contacted by DPH in 2011 after being in practice for 11 years and asked to consider reviewing a file regarding a complaint against a psychologist. Since then I have been contacted 3 additional times by DPH to do so. I have devoted long hours to promptly reviewing each case pro bono and then submitting an opinion to DPH regarding whether the psychologist had met the accepted standard of practice and appropriate level of care in their work. All three cases I reviewed pertained to psychologists working in various capacities (e.g. therapist; mediator; evaluator) in the family court, divorce/child custody realm. In each matter, I diligently analyzed the data and specific complaints leveled against the psychologist to determine whether the standard of practice had been met.

Training and education as a psychologist teaches us to consider the complexity in situations and to objectively analyze and assess matters, and to do this in the most balanced, responsible, and comprehensive ways possible. In my work, I consistently utilize multiple sources of information for reaching any psychological conclusions and diligently analyze data from various perspectives. I strive to always maintain the utmost respect for the adolescents, adults, and families I see for therapy and via evaluations and try to do my work in the most humble and professional manner possible. The meetings I attend with other psychologists, whether via my Connecticut Psychological Association board membership, study groups, or for networking, consistently confirm for me the intelligence, honesty, warmth, and incredible respect psychologists have for the practice of psychology and for the families we work with. It has also left me keenly aware of

psychologists' abilities to responsibly and fairly analyze and scrutinize the work of other psychologists and to point out flaws in other psychologists' work where they exist.

Therefore, it is extremely worrisome that the proponents of HB6267 seem to wish to hijack the complaint process to further what appears to be an extremely personal agenda. This is in contrast to the present process, which seeks to diligently determine in an objective, unbiased manner the basis of and merit to a complaint. In reality, complaints at DPH against psychologists are uncommon and have been trending downward. A discussion I had in late 2014 with DPH indicated 22 complaints in 2012, 17 in 2013, and to that point 9 in 2014. Nonetheless, any complaint exacts a significant personal and professional toll on the psychologist in question.

I approach my work as a psychotherapist as well as an evaluator in a highly conciliatory, nonpartisan, and thoughtfully analytical manner. I seek to assist individuals I see understand themselves and their circumstances better and always strive to do so in the most gentle and caring way possible. I closely adhere to proper ethics and accepted standards of practice for doing so and regularly seek continuing education and ongoing consultation with other psychologists for improving my clinical and evaluative skills. I maintain malpractice insurance against the possibility that my work might be aggrieved and accept that there is a process at the state level for reviewing my work under the license of psychologist granted to me by the state of Connecticut. I cannot however abide that anyone who is displeased with the psychological services or psychological opinions I offer, including at times as an expert witness to a court, could so easily engender a campaign and potentially highly personal attack against me. HB 6267 appears to foster the prospect of just such an outcome.

I did not attend the previous GAL task force hearings, but watched some via the Connecticut Network. I was appalled by the personal attacks upon psychologists who served as GALs made by some task force members as well as some members of the public. I was also astonished by how one sided the presentations were from individuals who testified about how unfairly they felt treated in the family courts while never uttering a word about any role they may have played in becoming embroiled in such a highly contested divorce/custody battle or regarding how their own actions may have impacted their children. The legislature in convening the GAL task force and considering a task force regarding HB 6267 is excusing some individuals' for their extremely poor abilities for resolving conflict adaptively and emboldening them to continue to aggressively look to everyone and anyone other than themselves for explanation for their circumstances. I believe HB 6267 would create an unnecessarily hostile process of review at DPH and contribute to complainants seeking to find scapegoats among psychologists for their personal and family troubles. My growing fear is for just how far the incredible hostility of some indignant persons toward psychologists may go. In my opinion, HB 6267 does not represent a move toward greater prudence and reason, but is instead a further step toward engendering highly personal attacks and continuing an angry agenda by some highly embittered individuals.

Sincerely,

Ralph P. Balducci